



University of the West of England, Bristol

The University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE Bristol) spans four campuses in the Bristol area with the majority of students studying on the Frenchay campus just four miles to the north of the city centre.

There are approximately 31,000 students and 3,600 staff.

Background

UWE Bristol has 10,000m² of conferencing and events space, including an Exhibition & Conference Centre (ECC) with 4,000m² of flexible space. This is the largest facility of its kind in South West England.

These are University buildings, which are used for academic purposes as well as for generating external commercial revenues.

There was a feeling within the University that the conferencing and events business had real potential if it was set up appropriately. With this in mind, UWE Bristol engaged the services of The Litmus Partnership (Litmus) to conduct a review in order to determine the viability of the business.

Brief

- ▶ To review the conferencing and events operation and identify its merits and its shortcomings
- ▶ To determine its viability in the long term i.e. whether it has the potential to be a successful commercial business
- ▶ To identify the changes that need to be introduced in order for the business to operate successfully
- ▶ To recommend the appropriate strategy and provide an outline implementation plan

Approach

The review was carried out between April and June 2019 and there were four phases of work.

Phase 1: Preparation

- ▶ Developing the project scope
- ▶ Finalising the objectives
- ▶ Agreeing the timetable with key events and milestones
- ▶ Data and information gathering

Phase 2: Research

- ▶ Visiting site
- ▶ Assessing the conferencing and events operations, including the facilities
- ▶ Reviewing existing customer feedback and conducting additional customer research
- ▶ Researching the competitive environment
- ▶ Stakeholder engagement – meetings with 15 stakeholders identified by UWE Bristol

Phase 3: Analysis

- ▶ Benchmarking business model, delegate rates and financial performance
- ▶ Suitability of resources and equipment
- ▶ Organisational structure
- ▶ Sales and marketing activities and market potential
- ▶ Understanding key issues
- ▶ SWOT analysis
- ▶ Options appraisal

Phase 4: Reporting

- ▶ Key findings
- ▶ Summary of key challenges and opportunities for growth
- ▶ Recommendations and strategy
- ▶ Outline implementation plan

Outcomes

We concluded that the amount of work required, and time needed to rebuild the conference and events business was considerable. The ECC was never designed as a bespoke non-residential conference centre but adapted from previous use when owned by Hewlett Packard as it was an on-campus building. Furthermore, the potential for business growth was hindered by academic demands on the space available for letting.

It was clear that a successful conference and events business would be beneficial to the university, both financially and reputationally. With this in mind, we made the following recommendations:

- ▶ Implementation of an effective senior management structure
- ▶ Position C&E as a positive contributor and reputational enhancer to UWE Bristol, within both the C&E department and the academic and administrative communities

- ▶ Drive customer relationship management to both the external and internal markets
- ▶ Determine the sovereignty and responsibility for ECC usage
- ▶ Secure short-term investment funding that addresses some of the issues within ECC
- ▶ Resolve car parking
- ▶ Create a C&E brand determining whether catering should be included within the brand
- ▶ Implement a business strategy and financial business plan with clear roles and responsibilities, including:
 - ▶ Sales, marketing and social media
 - ▶ Business model
 - ▶ HR / L&D
 - ▶ Facility plan including maintenance and capital investment
 - ▶ IT plan
 - ▶ Customer service / feedback
 - ▶ Food and beverage plan

In the longer term, UWE Bristol will need to decide upon the future of the ECC building as a conference centre and events space as additional investment will be required to turn it into a really flexible fit for purpose C&E space.



For more information about Litmus get in touch:

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